Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Bridge
Savannah River, 2.5 miles west of
Calhoun Falls
Abbeville County
South Carolina

HAER No. SC-6

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SEABOARD COAST LINE RAILROAD BRIDGE
HAER SC-6

Location: The bridge is 2.5 miles west of Calhoun Falls, South Carolina, one-quarter mile below the mouth of Rocky River. The track reaches the Georgia bank three-quarters of a mile above the mouth of Beaverdam Creek in Elbert County.

UTM: 17.348620.3771660
Quad: Heardmont

Date of Construction: 1890, 1909, 1928, 1930

Present Owner: Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Co., Jacksonville, Florida

Present Use: Railroad Bridge

Significance: The Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Bridge spans the Savannah River between Abbeville County, S.C., and Elbert County, Ga. The structure is a 24-span plate girder railroad bridge which spans 1,790' across the Savannah River. The bridge site was first developed in 1890, rebuilt in 1909 and 1928, and took its present form in 1930. This site comprises the first permanent railroad crossing of the Savannah River above Augusta and played a critical role in the shipment of granite from Elberton's newly founded granite industry.

Historian: John P. Johnson, September 1980

SEABOARD COAST LINE RAILROAD BRIDGE

The Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Bridge spans the Savannah River between Abbeville County, South Carolina, and Elbert County, Georgia. The bridge is three miles west of Calboun Falls, one-quarter mile below the mouth of the Rocky River. The track reaches the Georgia bank three-quarters of a mile above the mouth of Beaverdam Creek. The bridge site was first developed in 1890, rebuilt in 1909 and 1928, and was completed in its present form in 1930. The structure is presently a 24-span plate girder railroad bridge that carries traffic 1,790' across the Savannah River.

Tbe Georgia, Carolina and Northern Railway was consolidated in February 1887. In July 1889, the entire railroad was leased in perpetuity to the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad Company and the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company. On July 23 the Elberton Star published a map of the new rail line. The Star announced that the tracks were progressing from Monroe, North Carolina, through Greenwood, South Carolina. The Star also announced that the companies planned to cross the Savannah River near Elberton as the line continued on to Athens and Atlanta, Georgia.[1]

In April 1890, the Adams Quarry near Elberton was busy preparing 1,800 cubic yards of granite blocks for bridge piers. During the summer, six granite piers were set on bedrock in the river and a wooden deck trestle about 1,800' long was constructed. By September 1890, the single track had crossed the river and was being laid toward Elberton. The citizens of Elbert County welcomed Engine No. 405 of the G.C.& N. Railway as it arrived at the newly constructed depot on April 14, 1891. Rail construction was completed to Athens by June 1, 1891.

At the bridge site the Savannah River is divided into two channels by Paris Island. The west channel is the main river and at low water is about 400' wide and from 2' to 8' deep. Tbe 1890 wooden trestle (constructed from tbe South Carolina bank) consisted of: one 135' trestle; one 175' deck truss across tbe east channel; one 875' trestle over Paris Island; three spans of deck trusses, each 150', across the west channel; and one 345' trestle to tbe Georgia bank. The base of the 1890 track was 54' above low water.

The U. S. Weather Bureau maintained a gauging station here to take systematic measurements of the flow of the Savannah River. The station was in operation from August 1896 until December 1903. On November 7, 1901, the G.C. & N. Railroad was merged into the Seaboard Air Line Railway.[3]

In August 1908, the entire Savannah River Valley experienced the worst flooding since 1852. The trestles across both channels were nearly destroyed and an eastbound passenger train was forced to wait near Middleton, Georgia, until temporary repairs could be made. In May 1909, A. A. Phelgan of the Vaughn Construction Company of Roanoke, Virginia,

supervised the partial replacement of the wooden trestle. The company added earth fill to the Georgia and South Carolina banks, poured 15 concrete piers and installed 16 steel deck plate girders, each 73' long. Although the original granite piers were topped with concrete and girders were installed, the track bed was actually lowered 6' from the 1890 track level. However, this allowed more clearance for flood waters and debris passing under the girders than under the old wooden trestle. The 1909 track was set 23' above the highwater mark of the August 1908 flood.

In April 1928, T. A. Loving of Goldsboro, North Carolina, secured a contract to repair tbe structure. H. R. Bell, engineer for the Seaboard Air Line Railway from Atlanta, was present to supervise the work in the east channel. The company added one concrete pier, raised (with concrete) two granite piers to the 1909 track level, and set two 89' deck plate girders.[5]

In 1930 construction was completed in the west channel and the bridge took its present form. At that time, three concrete piers were set, four granite piers were raised (with concrete) to the 1909 track level, and six deck plate girders, each 76' long, were set on the new foundation work. These girders were manufactured by the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company.[6]

On June 1, 1967, the Seaboard Air Line Railway was merged with the Atlantic Coast Line to form the current Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Company. During the summer of 1980 the bridge was still in use while construction of a new railroad bridge proceeded about one-quarter mile south.

Footnotes:

1. Correspondence, R. L. Bullard, Seaboard Coast Line Railroad to J. L. Hopkins, Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, March 2, 1979.

Elberton Star, July 23, December 14, 1889; February 28, 1890.

2. Elberton Star, April 4, September 12, 1890; April 17, 1891. See also, Star, January 26, 1894.

3. Hall, B. M. A Preliminary Report on a Part of the Water Powers of Georgia. Atlanta: Geological Survey of Georgia, Bulletin No. 3-A, 1896, pp. 108-109. Hall, B.M. and M.R. Hall. Second Report on the Water Powers of Georgia. Atlanta: Geological Survey of Georgia, Bulletin No. 16, 1908, pp. 46-47.

4. Star, August 28, 1908; May 11, 1909.

5. Star, April 17, 1928.

6. Correspondence, R. L. Bullard to J. P. Johnson, Historic American Engineering Record, August 20, 1980. Drawing of bridge with engineering details.

See also, Patterson, William H. "Through the Heart of the South: A History of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad Company, 1832-1950." PhD Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1951.

See also illustration of original railroad trestle in True Stories of the Savannah. Calhoun Falls, S.C.: H. T. Cannon, nd., p. 72.